

# **Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Canada, the United Nations, and the Search for a Korean Armistice, 1952-53**

Dr Greg Donaghy

Canada's attachment to the UN has declined sharply during the last 25 years, reflecting the organization's growing irrelevance. Stifling bureaucracies in New York and Geneva, the radicalization of the general assembly, new forms of international governance, and the constraining embrace of the North American trading bloc have all combined to render the august international organization much less important to Canada. Even so, Canadian governments continue to emphasize the centrality of the world body in their foreign policy. Earlier this fall, Prime Minister Paul Martin Jr. proclaimed in New York that "Canada cannot conceive of a world succeeding without the United Nations."<sup>1</sup> Most Canadians share the prime minister's faith. A 2004 poll indicated that 75 percent of his compatriots would rather work with the UN than the US to address world issues.<sup>2</sup> Such figures would not have surprised Martin's predecessor, the canny populist, Jean Chrétien. On the eve of the second Gulf War in the spring of 2003, he tapped into this vein of opinion when he held out for a UN resolution to the crisis in Iraq, while his domestic critics sneered that "multilateralism was not a policy."

Chrétien's instinctive support for a UN solution to a distant crisis involving Canada's closest ally reflected a policy tradition deeply rooted in postwar Canadian diplomacy. Along

---

1."Address by Prime Minister Paul Martin at the United Nations General Assembly," 16 September 2005, New York, New York, <http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/news.asp?id=584> .

2. Foreign Affairs Canada [FAC] Communications Survey 2004, Historical Section, FAC.

with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Ottawa policy-makers have historically viewed the UN as one of the country's key instruments for managing international conflict. During the cold war, it was especially valued for its capacity, however imperfect, to limit superpower confrontations outside NATO's European core, an objective that satisfied Canada's North Atlantic orientation. Canadian efforts to resolve the Suez Crisis in 1956, for which Canada's foreign minister, Lester B. Pearson, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, largely reflected these preoccupations, defining an entire era in Canadian diplomacy.

While Suez has been extensively celebrated, Canadian efforts in the fall of 1952 to engineer a UN solution to the deadlocked Korean armistice negotiations have been largely overlooked. Most scholarly analysts have focussed on the Anglo-American debates over the merits of the Indian motion at the heart of the UN initiative, ignoring Canada's role in these discussions and the factors motivating Ottawa. The participants themselves, however, are united on the significance of Canada's role, even as they disagree on what that role actually was. Pearson, for example, figures prominently in the account of the crisis by US secretary of state Dean Acheson, who blames him for encouraging India's divisive motion.<sup>3</sup> Acheson's antagonist, the Indian diplomat Krishna Menon, fingers Paul Martin Sr., head of the Canadian delegation, as the main cause of unwelcome changes in his resolution.<sup>4</sup> Canadian policy-makers are even more explicit in claiming a decisive place for their diplomacy. Chester Ronning, a senior official in the department of external affairs, contends that Canada's role "was fully as important as the Suez success to which greater importance was attached because Korea was away off in Asia."<sup>5</sup> Though undoubtedly exaggerated, Ronning's claim underlines

---

3. Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), p. 700.

4. Michael Brecher, *India and World Politics: Krishna Menon's View of the World* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 38.

5. Chester Ronning, "Canada and the United Nations" in King Gordon, ed., *Canada's Role as a Middle Power* (Toronto: Canadian Institute of International Affairs, 1966), p. 42. Ronning's claim was endorsed by Escott Reid

the need for a closer look at the documentary record on Canada's role in the 1952 UN debate on Korea and on the outcome's impact on the Canadian approach to the armistice negotiations in the spring of 1953.

With its attention fixed firmly on the Soviet threat to the North Atlantic and western Europe, Canada was a reluctant recruit to the US-led crusade to save South Korea from communist aggression in June 1950. Worried that Washington might become bogged down in a direct confrontation with the People's Republic of China, Pearson tried twice to advance the prospects for early negotiations: in October 1950, as UN forces prepared to cross the 38th parallel, and then in December 1950, following China's entry into the conflict. In the face of American pressure, Pearson pressed neither initiative to the point of damaging the western alliance and abandoned the search for a diplomatic opening in the winter of 1951.<sup>6</sup>

It briefly seemed that diplomacy might regain its importance when the front in Korea stabilized and armistice negotiations between the United Nations Command (UNC) and communist military authorities began in the summer of 1951. Yet there was little need for diplomats as the talks between the two military commanders dragged on slowly until deadlocked in May 1952 over the release and disposition of prisoners-of-war (POWs). Aware that many POWs in UNC hands would refuse to return willingly to their communist homelands, the US insisted that the UNC would not use force to compel their return. The decision reflected both Washington's belief in the principle of individual freedom as well as its recognition that the defection of large numbers of communist POWs to the West represented a substantial cold war propaganda victory. Chinese and North Korean negotiators

---

in his memoir of his time as Canada's high commissioner to India in the early 1950s, *Envoy to Nehru* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 43.

6. On Canadian diplomacy during the early phase of the war, see my article, "Pacific Diplomacy: Canadian Statecraft and the Korean War, 1950-53," in Rick Guisso and Yong-Sik Yoo (eds.), *Canada and Korea: Perspectives 2000* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press and the Centre for Korean Studies, 2002), pp. 81-100.

insisted that every POW be repatriated, voluntarily or otherwise, in accordance with the provisions of the 1949 Geneva Convention on POWs.

Ottawa was not unduly concerned as the deadlocked negotiations dragged on into the summer of 1952. Pearson was generally pleased with the efforts of the American negotiators at Panmunjom and hopeful that a *de facto* armistice might emerge from the stalemate. Nevertheless, Canadian policy-makers feared that the frustrated Americans might adjourn the talks at any moment and step-up UN military pressure on China. In early May 1952, Pearson reacted sharply when the senior US delegate to the armistice negotiations, Vice-Admiral C. Turner Joy, hinted that the UN would break off the talks and renew offensive military operations.<sup>7</sup> As advance preparations for the 8th UN General Assembly got underway in August 1952, Pearson was disturbed to discover that Washington intended to seek UN support for just that course of action.

After two years of war, Americans were tired of fighting. On the eve of the 1952 presidential election, President Harry Truman's administration found itself under intense political and economic pressure to seek a settlement.<sup>8</sup> Convinced that a little more pressure on Beijing would produce a new willingness to compromise, the administration set out in August to enlist the support of its key Western allies for a UN initiative in support of a greater UNC effort against China. As a first step, it proposed that the general assembly adopt a resolution endorsing the UNC's negotiating position and calling on communist negotiators to accept its views on the repatriation of POWs. Anticipating the rejection of this resolution, Washington

---

7. Secretary of State for External Affairs [SSEA] to the Ambassador in Washington, 15 May 1952, Telegram EX-1085, reprinted in Donald Barry, ed., *Documents on Canadian External Relations [DCER], Volume 18: 1952* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1990), pp. 130-31.

8. Rosemary Foot, *A Substitute for Victory: The Politics of Peacemaking at the Korean Armistice Talks*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp 152-53.

suggested that the UN pass a second resolution urging its members to impose additional economic and political sanctions against China.<sup>9</sup>

Alarmed by the American scheme, Ottawa warned the US that "public pressure has the effect of making the communists more stiff-necked and more determined to follow whatever course they have embarked upon." Moreover, repeating a familiar Canadian refrain, Pearson cautioned that the effort to isolate Beijing would not secure broad support at the UN, would further divide Western and Asian members, and would increase "neutral sentiment" at the UN.<sup>10</sup> In the absence of a quick and reassuring response from the US, Canadian anxieties grew unchecked in early September. A report from the French mission in New York speculating that the Pentagon "was now firmly in the saddle so far as the conduct of operations in Korea" was circulated widely through the department of external affairs.<sup>11</sup> Dana Wilgress, Pearson's deputy, claimed to be "particularly worried" by rumours that the US Navy favoured a naval blockade to bring China to its knees.<sup>12</sup> These concerns were shared by Brooke Claxton, the veteran minister of defence, who considered it "quite unrealistic to believe that UN forces could make any substantial advance along the ground without appalling losses beyond the point of acceptability." The minister judged the American proposal and the situation in Korea "one of the most dangerous since the end of the [Second World] war."<sup>13</sup>

---

9. Foot, *A Substitute for Victory*, pp. 152-53. Ottawa first learned of US thinking in late July; see Ambassador in Washington to SSEA, 24 July 1952, Telegram W-1928, Record Group [RG] 25, Vol 4767, File 50069-A-40, Library and Archives of Canada [LAC.]

10. Ottawa to Washington, Telegram EX-1759, 28 August 1952, reprinted in Barry, ed., *DCER, Volume 18: 1952*, pp. 152-53.

11. L.D. Wilgress, Memorandum for the Minister, 4 September 1952, RG 25, Vol 4767, File 50069-A-40, LAC.

12. L.D. Wilgress to Hume Wrong, 15 September 1952, RG 25, Vol 4767, File 50069-A-40, LAC.

13. Draft telegram from SSEA to the Permanent Representative in New York (Johnson from Claxton), 16 September 1952, RG 25, Vol 4767, File 50069-A-40, LAC.

Canadian concerns were echoed by France, as well as the four other “old Commonwealth” powers that Washington consulted: Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. As a result, the US retreated in late September and indicated that it would proceed only with its first resolution endorsing the UNC’s negotiating stance. Hume Wrong, Canada’s ambassador in Washington, interpreted this shift in American policy as reassuring evidence that the two-stage proposal was dead.<sup>14</sup> But Wrong’s views were discounted in Ottawa, where the diplomat was sometimes suspected of adhering too closely to the American view. Wilgress, for instance, thought that Wrong’s reports were “not yet such as to free us entirely from anxiety.”<sup>15</sup> Ronning, head of the Far Eastern and American division, similarly suspected that Washington still intended to press the general assembly to impose “stringent economic measures” against China.<sup>16</sup> Pearson himself shared these worries and thought it likely that the US would insist on a second resolution urging increased “economic, diplomatic, and possibly military pressure on the Chinese.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, while Canada reluctantly agreed to co-sponsor the American draft, it explicitly reserved the right to support an alternate resolution on Korea if it became obvious that non-aligned states like India would not support the Western position.<sup>18</sup> US secretary of state Acheson tabled the US resolution with 21 co-sponsors on 24 October.

Even before he arrived in New York, Pearson, who was elected president of the general assembly on 14 October, was under pressure from delegates to frame a different

---

14. Ambassador in Washington to SSEA, Telegrams WA-2278 and WA-2279, 18 September 1952, reprinted in Barry, ed., *DCER, Volume 18: 1952*, pp. 161-63; Hume Wrong to L.D. Wilgress, 19 September 1952, RG 25, Vol 4767, File 50069-A-40, LAC.

15. L.D. Wilgress to Brooke Claxton, 22 September 1952, RG 25, Vol 4767, File 50069-A-40, LAC.

16. Chester Ronning for the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs (USSEA) to the High Commission in London, Letter Y-1897, 24 September 1952, RG 25, Vol 4767, File 50069-A-40, LAC.

17. L.B. Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson*, Volume 2: 1948-1957 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. 137.

18. Chairman, Delegation to the UN General Assembly [UN Chairman] to SSEA, 24 October 1952, reprinted in Barry, ed., *DCER, Volume 18: 1952*, p. 173.

approach to the Korean problem.<sup>19</sup> He was joined in his search by another Canadian, Paul Martin Sr., the minister of health and welfare and head of the Canadian delegation. This was Martin's first major UN assignment. A deeply committed internationalist, he was an ambitious and talented politician who resented Pearson's rapid elevation to foreign minister and was anxious to make his own mark on the world stage.<sup>20</sup> When a round of secret Commonwealth consultations in late October revealed that India would not support the 21-power resolution, Martin and Pearson strongly urged Krishna Menon, the vice-chairman of the Indian delegation, to prepare an alternative.

Coaxing Menon to translate his vague suggestion that the UN simply fudge the POW issue into a formal resolution was a difficult challenge. Unsure of his standing in Washington and Beijing and anxious about his role in New York, the prickly Indian diplomat refused to put his ideas into writing and was often easily discouraged by criticism to the point of quitting. But Menon was happy to work with Pearson, for whom he had a "great deal of personal affection."<sup>21</sup> In contrast, Pearson found Menon tiresome and complained that his reasoning was "tortuous and metaphysical." Nevertheless, convinced of Menon's sincerity, Pearson responded to his overtures with "tea and sympathy."<sup>22</sup> Martin too tried to reassure the Indian that his efforts were appreciated, notably with a carefully-phrased statement endorsing the view that the POWs might be turned over to a neutral protecting power, an idea at the core of Menon's thinking. Though the British minister of state for foreign affairs, Selwyn Lloyd,

---

19. Permanent Representative in New York to SSEA, Despatch 1236, 24 September 1952, RG 25, Vol 4767, File 50069-A-40. See also Pearson, *Mike*, pp. 316.

20. See Greg Donaghy and Donald Barry, "Our Man from Windsor: Paul Martin and the New Members Question, 1955," in Ryan Touhey, ed. *Paul Martin and Canadian Diplomacy* (Waterloo: Centre on Foreign Policy and Federalism, 1999), pp. 7-8.

21. Brecher, *India and World Politics*, pp. 10-11.

22. Pearson, *Mike*, pp. 316; see also, Geoffrey Pearson, "Canada Looks Ahead: Lester Pearson and Escott Reid," in Greg Donaghy and Stéphane Roussel, eds., *Escott Reid: Diplomat and Scholar* (Kingston & Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2004), p. x.

also encouraged Menon to act, London's reserved attitude toward the Indian initiative at this stage meant that Martin and Pearson carried most of the burden.<sup>23</sup>

By the middle of November, Menon had finished drafting his resolution, a complicated and ambiguous piece of work that even a sympathetic observer described as an "Indian rope trick."<sup>24</sup> It endorsed the Communist view that the repatriation of POWs should take place in accordance with the Geneva Convention, acknowledging the principle of forcible repatriation. At the same time, however, it asked each side not to use force to repatriate POWs. Instead, when the armistice was signed, the POWs would be turned over to a repatriation commission composed of four mutually-agreed states, with a fifth to be chosen as umpire, if necessary. After three months, unrepatriated POWs would be sent to a post-armistice conference on Korea's future. Precisely what would happen next was deliberately left undefined.

Though Martin and Pearson recognized the difficulties involved for Washington in retreating from the principle of non-forcible repatriation, they cast Canada's influence strongly behind Menon's "ingenious formula." If India managed to overcome the deadlock on POWs, everyone would benefit from the resulting armistice. (At least initially, Ottawa was hopeful that Menon's initiative had taken into account the views of China, with whom New Delhi was on friendly terms, and that it stood an even chance at success.) Even if Menon failed to achieve his ultimate objective, his initiative still offered the democratic powers some solid gains, including the opportunity to tie India, the leading democracy in Asia, more closely to the West. If the resolution failed despite strong Western support, New Delhi would appreciate how difficult it was to deal with the Communists and would be more inclined to support the western effort in Asia. More important from the Canadian perspective, an Indian

---

23. John Milloy, "The North Atlantic Triangle and the 1952 Indian Resolution to Resolve the Deadlock over Prisoners of the Korean War," London School of Economics, Special MA Paper, 12 September 1990.

24. Peter Stursberg, *Agreement in Principle* (Toronto: Longmans, Green & Co., 1961), p. 165.

initiative that secured Washington's support (however reluctantly) would effectively limit any future American plans to seek UN support for great sanctions against China.<sup>25</sup>

Acheson was outraged when he learned of Menon's initiative. In part, his anger reflected a sense of personal betrayal that the Indian motion had proceeded so far along without his input. He and Pearson, who had greeted the American's appointment as secretary of state by quipping that he was "delighted personally, officially, internationally and alcoholically,"<sup>26</sup> had been friends since the 1930s. He was surprised that the Canadian had conspired behind his back. In his memoirs, Acheson bitterly denounces Pearson and the other members of the "Menon cabal."<sup>27</sup>

American objections also reflected substantial differences in policy. The resolution failed to affirm the principle of non-forcible repatriation and it provided no guidance on the ultimate fate of the "hard-core" POWs who refused to return home except indefinite detention while the political conference debated their fate. It was, the US secretary of state told the British, "almost frighteningly clear where efforts like Menon's would lead us... we had started on basis we would not use force to repatriate prisoners, we had now reached the point where if this resolution were passed we would be starting Pws [sic] on road to forced repatriation."<sup>28</sup>

With Truman's support, Acheson and his delegation in New York mounted a sustained campaign to convince Canada and Britain to abandon Menon and support the 21-power resolution. On November 13, the US secretary of state confronted Pearson and the British

---

25. Permanent Representative in New York to SSEA, Telegram 101, 28 October 1952 reprinted in Barry, *DCER, Volume 18: 1952*, pp. 176-178. See also SSEA to Permanent Representative in New York, Telegram 100, 10 November 1952, reprinted in *ibid*, pp. 189-92.

26. Cited in John English, *The Worldly Years: The Life of Lester B. Pearson, Volume II: 1949-72* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), p. 10.

27. Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1969), p. 700. A similar theme also permeates the memoirs of U. Alexis Johnson, *The Right Hand of Power: The memoirs of an American diplomat* (Englewoods Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1984), p. 145.

28. Secretary of State to Department of State, 12 November 1952, reprinted in *FRUS, 1952-1954, Volume XV*, p. 610.

foreign secretary, Anthony Eden. Cheered on by Australia, New Zealand and France, Acheson launched a "vigorous onslaught" against India's draft resolution, denouncing it as "completely unacceptable."<sup>29</sup> He argued that Menon's motion did not make it "sufficiently clear" that force would not be used to repatriate POWs and did nothing to resolve the problem of "hard core" POWs. "The whole burden of the Indian draft resolution," he concluded, "was on the side of forcing the prisoner to stay in custody until he should agree to repatriation."<sup>30</sup> The secretary of state urged Pearson and Eden to return to the 21-power resolution as the basis for UN action, amending it to meet any Indian objections.

The burden of reply fell on Pearson. The Canadian emphasized the importance of securing an armistice and the opportunity offered to get the Indians "off the fence." He rejected the notion that the Commonwealth group had abandoned the principle of non-forcible repatriation. In reply to the argument that the resolution left the "hard core" POWs without any future, Pearson pointed out that they had no future at the moment, pragmatically adding that the proposal would at least free those POWs who wanted to go home and reduce the problem to more manageable proportions. He insisted that the West should rally in support of the Indian resolution, adding amendments where necessary. The meeting ended without agreement.

An Anglo-Canadian effort to revise the Indian resolution on November 13-14 brought the two sides marginally closer. The new draft "affirmed" in its preamble that force would not be used to repatriate POWs and tidied up some American concerns about the composition and operation of the repatriation commission. However, it still referred "hard core" POWs to a post-armistice political conference. Acheson was unimpressed. He described the revised resolution as "a very dangerous document" and quickly amplified the pressure on Canada and

---

29. Pearson, *Mike*, p. 324.

30. UN Chairman to SSEA, Telegram 281, 14 November 1952, reprinted in Barry, ed., *DCER, Volume 18: 1952*, pp. 197-200; Pearson, *Mike*, pp. 324; *FRUS, 1952-1954, Volume XV*, p. 617.

Britain.<sup>31</sup> On November 16, he brought Robert Lovett, secretary of defense, and General Omar Bradley, chairman of the joint chiefs of staff, to New York to emphasize the importance the administration attached to the 21-power resolution. The Americans reiterated the principal points of US opposition to the Indian draft, objecting strongly to Menon's failure to provide for the release of hard-core POWs. Lovett and Bradley also insisted that the resolution's inexact language would make it hard to determine when a breach of the truce had occurred, providing Communist commanders an opportunity to rebuild their forces and renew hostilities. Pearson and Lloyd reacted sceptically and held out little hope that Menon could be brought any further toward the American position.<sup>32</sup>

More negotiations followed. After a vigorous confrontation between Acheson and Martin at a meeting of the 21 western powers, the group struck a sub-committee to review the two resolutions and debate tactics. Under the direction of Percy Spender, the abrasive head of the Australian mission at the UN, it met twice on 18 November for over four hours. Doggedly, Ernie Gross, deputy US representative at the UN, repeated the military arguments advanced by Lovett and Bradley and insisted on priority for the 21-power resolution. With a growing number of countries prepared to proceed on the basis of the Indian resolution, Spender eventually persuaded Gross to circulate a draft of the amendments Washington demanded. Most of these could be accommodated easily. However, Menon refused to change the final paragraph to make it clear that hard-core POWs would be released by the repatriation commission within 90 days of the armistice. This was at odds with the communist view of the Geneva Convention and was bound to be rejected by Beijing.

---

31 Pearson, *Mike*, p. 324; Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, 14 November 1952, reprinted in *FRUS, 1952-1954, Volume XV*, p. 621-22.

32 Chairman, Canadian Delegation to SSEA, Telegram 291, 17 November 1952, reprinted in Barry, ed., *DCER, Volume 18: 1952*, pp. 202-05.

Martin was hopeful that the American redraft signalled a shift in US policy. He was wrong. In exchange for granting the Indian resolution priority, Gross insisted that the 21 co-sponsors adopt Washington's amendments regardless of India's reaction. Otherwise, the US would simply proceed with the divisive resolution, a threat accompanied by a sharp increase in American pressure on Canada and Great Britain into line. In an encounter at the Waldorf Hotel, Acheson and Jack Hickerson, an assistant secretary of state, shocked Eden with their hard drinking and rough tactics. Acheson dismissed Pearson as "an empty glass of water" and brutally promised to bring Canada "to heel." Hickerson was just as blunt, asking "Anthony, which will you choose: the US or India?"<sup>33</sup>

Acheson, who headed to Ottawa on 21 November for a previously scheduled visit, tried to outflank his Canadian counterpart by putting his case directly to the Canadian prime minister, Louis St. Laurent. Pearson had already warned Claxton that Acheson was coming in a "highly emotional state" and the American made little progress with the prime minister.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, the pressure mounted in New York, where Gross leaked news of the growing western rift to the weekend papers, which caricatured Pearson as "Nehru with a homburg" and implied that he was anti-American.<sup>35</sup> Eden and Pearson were deeply offended by the American tactics, but undeterred. After a talk with St. Laurent, they decided to back Menon's resolution as it stood.

Nevertheless, for almost twelve hours on November 22, a tag-team of Canadian and British diplomats – Pearson, Eden, Lloyd and Martin – pressed Menon to meet the US position on hard-core POWs. Recalling Martin's activities a decade later, Menon was still

---

33 Evelyn Shuckburgh, *Descent to Suez: Foreign Office Diaries, 1951-1956* (New York: W.W. Norton Ltd., 1987), p. 53-54.

34 Charles Ritchie, Memorandum for the USSEA, 21 November 1952, RG 25, Vol 4768, File 50069-A-40; see also SSEA to Chairman, Canadian Delegation in New York, Telegram 165, 22 November 1952, reprinted in Barry, ed., *DCER, Volume 18: 1952*, pp. 1372-74. Acheson claims to have successfully outflanked Pearson. See Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, p. 700.

35 Paul Martin, *A Very Public Life, Volume II: So Many Worlds* (Toronto: Deneau, 1985), p. 152.

irritated. “The main role [Martin] played,” Menon complained, “was to push me rather than push the other side.”<sup>36</sup> Under the pressure, the Indian gradually gave ground, agreeing that if the post-armistice political conference failed to resolve the POW question within 60 days, the prisoners would be transferred to the UN “for their care and maintenance until the end of their detention.” Though he still refused to agree to their unconditional release, Menon’s concession and a vituperate attack on the Indian position by the Soviet Union were enough to persuade Washington to proceed on the basis of an amended Indian resolution. After a final round of negotiations, Menon and Acheson agreed on compromise language that directed the post-armistice conference to “transfer” hard-core POWs to the UN 120 days after the armistice was signed for “their care, maintenance and ... disposition.” On 3 December, the general assembly adopted Menon’s revised resolution by a vote of 54 to 5, with only the Soviet bloc opposed.

Although the Indian effort to advance the prospects for an armistice proved futile when Peking rejected the UN's resolution out of hand in late December, Canada was pleased with the result of the general assembly’s deliberations. India was firmly allied with the West on a Korean issue, which Ottawa judged an “impressive propaganda success” that “unite[d] the free world as never before.”<sup>37</sup> More important, since the December resolution would establish the starting point for any future negotiations, Canada and its allies had a helpful instrument to resist the temptation in Washington to look for an easy solution to the Korean deadlock through escalation. This provided some comfort in Ottawa as Dwight Eisenhower's Republican administration, with the strongly anti-communist John Foster Dulles as secretary of state, assumed office in January 1953.

---

36 Breacher, *India and World Politics*, p. 38.

37 Permanent Representative to the UN to SSEA, 31 December 1952, reprinted in Barry, ed., *DCER: Volume 18: 1952*, pp. 458, 469.

Pearson worried that Dulles, whom he once called “stupid,” was a clumsy diplomat, an impression that was reinforced when the American described Washington’s tough new strategy for containing the communist bloc.<sup>38</sup> “The Eisenhower administration,” Dulles explained to Pearson in February 1953, “was determined not to leave the initiative in the Cold War to the Soviet Union... [and] to create situations which would worry the Kremlin.” Disturbed by these remarks, Pearson cautioned that “it might be difficult to create uneasiness in the Soviet Union without at the same time creating uneasiness among the allies of the United States.”<sup>39</sup>

Pearson’s growing wariness of American intentions ensured an enthusiastic response in Ottawa when the final round of the armistice negotiations suddenly resumed in the spring of 1953. In late March, after responding positively to an earlier UNC offer to exchange sick and wounded POWs, the Chinese foreign minister, Chou En-lai, offered to negotiate on the basis that the two sides would agree to repatriate those POWs who wished to go home and send the remaining POWs to a neutral state “so as to ensure a just solution to the question of their repatriation.”<sup>40</sup>

The Canadian reaction was quick and warm. “No proposal since the Korean War began has raised such high hopes of an armistice,” observed David Johnson, Canada’s representative to the UN.<sup>41</sup> The Canadian position was based on the general assembly’s December deliberations. Like the US negotiators, Canada rejected the communist suggestion

---

38 John English, *The Worldly Years: The Life of Lester B. Pearson, Volume II: 1949-72* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), p. 121.

39 “Memorandum of a Conversation between the Secretary of State of the U.S. and the SSEA,” 15 February 1953, reprinted in Don Barry (ed.), *Documents on Canadian External Relations, Volume 19: 1953* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1991), pp.981-89.

40. Cited in Stairs, *The Diplomacy of Constraint*, p. 275.

41. Permanent Representative at the UN to Ottawa, Telegram 128, 1 April 1953, reprinted in Donald Barry (ed.), *Documents on Canadian External Relations, Volume 19: 1953* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1991), p. 63.

that POWs be physically transferred to a neutral state and admitted that there were aspects of the Chinese offer that needed clarifying. Overall, however, the department of external affairs concluded that "the principle underlying the Chinese proposal is sufficiently close to that underlying the Assembly's resolution to justify immediate resumption of the full armistice negotiations."<sup>42</sup>

During the first two weeks of the negotiations, which began on April 26, UNC negotiators made it clear that they could not accept the communist proposals as they stood. As a result, China and North Korea revised their offer on May 7. Adhering closely to the terms of Menon's resolution, the communists suggested that a repatriation commission, composed of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Switzerland, and Sweden, with India as chairman, take custody of the POWs in Korea. The commission would function on a majority basis. The POWs were to be held for four months, during which time each side would be free to explain to its nationals the process of repatriation. At the end of the four months, the problem of the hard-core POWs would be sent to the post-armistice political conference.

Pearson was pleased with the communist proposals. They went "a long way to meet [UNC] objections," and he considered the communist willingness to leave the POWs in Korea "an important concession." Indeed, the only significant difference between these proposals and the Indian resolution adopted by the general assembly was that the communists did not refer the hard-core POWs back to the UN if the post-armistice political conference failed to deal with them. With neither North Korea nor China a member of the UN this was neither surprising nor disturbing. Canada's foreign minister optimistically concluded that "the way was now open for the conclusion of an armistice."<sup>43</sup>

---

42. SSEA to Permanent Representative at the UN, Telegram 51, 2 April 1953, reprinted in Barry, ed., *DCER, Volume 19: 1953*, DCER 1953, p. 66.

43. SSEA to the Ambassador in Washington, Telegram EX-827, 12 May 1953, reprinted in Barry, ed., *DCER, Volume 19: 1953*, p. 77.

American negotiators, who were anxious to demonstrate the administration's determination to confront global communism, were less impressed. The UNC's counter-proposals rejected the idea of allowing Polish or Czech troops to guard POWs as part of the repatriation commission. Washington also insisted that the commission operate by unanimous decision. In addition, the US stated that the armistice agreement must contain a definite provision for the release and transfer to civilian status of hard-core POWs.<sup>44</sup>

Pearson was "very disturbed" by the rigid American counter-proposals, which injected several entirely new elements into the equation. He was "taken aback" by the idea that the repatriation commission should operate on the basis of unanimity, a position which "contrast[ed] sharply" with the Indian resolution.<sup>45</sup> When he learned that the American proposals, with an additional provision that all Korean POWs should be released rather than repatriated, had been delivered to Chinese and North Korean negotiators on May 13, he was outraged. Alarmed that this might lead to a breakdown in the talks, he immediately instructed Ambassador Hume Wrong that "it should be made clear to the United States that we do not propose to follow them in the abandonment of the United Nations resolution which we accepted in good faith and would expect to carry out accordingly."<sup>46</sup> Later that day, with cabinet support, the foreign minister told Wrong to inform the State Department that there was "no disposition on the part of the government to defend the recent US Armistice initiative which introduced without consultation such important changes."<sup>47</sup>

---

44 Ambassador in Washington to the SSEA, Telegram WA-1157, 11 May 1953, reprinted in Barry, ed., *DCER, Volume 19: 1953*, pp. 74-76.

45. SSEA to Ambassador in Washington, Telegram EX-838, 12 May 1953, reprinted in Barry, ed., *DCER, Volume 19: 1953*, p. 79.

46. Cited in Steven Hugh Lee, "A Special Relationship?: Canada-U.S. Relations and the Korean Armistice Negotiations, January-July 1953, in Hilliker and Halloran (eds.) *Diplomatic Documents and their Users*, p. 222.

47. SSEA to Ambassador in Washington, Telegram EX-850, 14 May 1950, reprinted in Barry, ed., *DCER, Volume 19: 1953*, p. 82.

Echoed by Washington's other principal allies in Korea, Canada's representations were not without impact in shaping the position adopted by the UNC when their May 13 counter-proposals were summarily rejected by the communists. In seeking Eisenhower's authority to moderate the American proposals, the acting secretary of state, Walter Bedell Smith, underlined the importance of allied support for the American effort in Korea, and warned that the "Korean negotiations are at a crisis point. Our position vis-a-vis the Allies is deteriorating daily."<sup>48</sup> On May 19, Smith summoned the heads of the "old Commonwealth" missions, and presented them with a more reasonable set of proposals. Though these would be "the final UNC position," Smith assured them that they would be advanced in language that reflected communist terms, and in a secret session designed to "avoid ultimatum aspects."<sup>49</sup>

There were four main provisions in the amended UNC position: first, Korean POWs would be treated like their Chinese counterparts and would be turned over to the repatriation commission; second, the commission would resolve questions of substance by a majority of four and procedural issues by a simple majority; third, the UNC would maintain its opposition to using Polish and Czech troops to guard the POWs, and press for Indian troops; and fourth, the UNC would insist on a provision that would release hard-core POWs from detention, this to be achieved by simply releasing those POWs 30 days after they were turned over to the political conference, or by transferring responsibility for them to the UN as envisioned in the Indian resolution. Ominously, Smith ending by emphasizing "that if it should come to a break-off in negotiations it cannot be expected that military operations can just sit where they are ... military operations will have to be intensified."<sup>50</sup>

---

48. "Memorandum by the A/Secretary of State to the President," May 18, 1953, reprinted in *FRUS, 1952-54, Volume XV*, pp. 1046-47; see also Foot, *A Substitute for Victory*, pp. 171-73.

49. Ambassador in Washington to SSEA, Telegram WA-1230, 19 May 1953, reprinted in *DCER, Volume 19: 1953*, pp. 87-88.

50. "Memorandum of Conversation by the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs (Johnson)," 19 May 1953, re-printed in *FRUS, 1952-54, Volume XV*, pp. 1052-56.

These UNC proposals were welcomed in Ottawa as a "distinct improvement." Pearson was "unhappy" only with the suggestion that the repatriation commission should resolve major questions by a majority of four as this contrasted directly with the terms of the Indian resolution. "[W]e should continue to stand by the resolution adopted by the Assembly on December 3," he explained. Fearful that the United States might seek to escalate the pressure on China should these proposals be rejected, Pearson was careful to set firm limits on Canadian cooperation. "In general, we consider that these new counter-proposals do provide a satisfactory basis for further negotiations, but we cannot, at this stage, accept being pinned down to agreement to them as a "final position" or to support any moves to break off negotiations if these proposals are not accepted."<sup>51</sup> Moreover, added Pearson a few days later, amid reports that the US National Security Council had decided to step up UNC military operations if the communists rejected the revised offer, he "assume[d] that there [would] be an opportunity for adequate consultation among the representatives of the countries after the Communist reply has been given at Panmunjom .. Our concern is that no decision be taken as to the next step until adequate opportunity for such consultation among the allies has been given. In the absence of such consultation, Canada could not accept responsibility for any instructions which might be sent to General Clark [the UNC negotiator] regarding additional military action."<sup>52</sup> Fortunately, the communists accepted the UNC terms on 4 June and on 27 July 1953, military commanders signed an agreement to bring the war in Korea to an uncertain end.

Canada hedged its support for the US-led intervention in Korea with real reservations about the wisdom of US policy in Asia. These concerns reflected Canada's status as a North

---

51. SSEA to Ambassador in Washington, Telegram EX-897, 21 May 1953, reprinted in Barry, ed., *DCER, Volume 19: 1953*, pp. 89-90.

52 Acting SSEA to Ambassador in Washington, Telegram EX-946, 28 May 1953, reprinted in Barry, ed., *DCER, Volume 19: 1953*, p. 101.

Atlantic power, whose main economic and political interests lay in Europe, and its view that Western policy in the Far East must win the support of India and the other Asian democracies. Acting on these reservations was often difficult for a smaller power like Canada, easily ignored in Washington. The United Nations, however, provided a venue where Ottawa could make its voice heard effectively. This was certainly the case in the fall of 1952. Increasingly fearful of Washington's plans to resolve the deadlocked armistice talks through escalation, Pearson used his standing as president of the general assembly and Canadian membership in the British Commonwealth to encourage an Indian initiative that sought to moderate American policy. With Menon's resolution in play, Canadian diplomats withstood strong US pressure to rejoin the Western group and slowly forced Washington to come to terms with India. The resulting resolution signalled the strong Western interest in ending the war. Just as important, the December motion became the measure against which Ottawa could judge Eisenhower's policies in the spring of 1953. The agreement reached during the UN debate allowed Pearson (and the other major Western allies) to insist that his support for US policy was conditional, compelling Washington to adopt a more accommodating stance in the final stages of the negotiations – a textbook example of what the Canadian political scientist, Denis Stairs, once called “the diplomacy of constraint.”